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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CANBERRA 000120

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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN AND DUTCH FOREIGN MINISTERS DISCUSS  
AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Political Counselor James F. Cole for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Netherlands Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen and Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith shared views on future engagement in Afghanistan in meetings January 18-21 in Australia. Both Ministers shared the view that more than one year after significant meetings in Bucharest and Paris, little progress has been made on the National Development Strategy for Afghanistan. They also noted the variability in NATO contributions with the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and OMLT deployments falling further behind. Both Ministers expect requests from the U.S. for additional support and will give those full consideration. They also anticipate an increased U.S. presence in RC-South, including a possible U.S. PRT leadership role. FM Smith advised FM Verhagen that Australia has taken a proactive approach to an anticipated U.S. request and is estimating what additional support can be provided, including enabling contributions for areas other than RC-South. They agreed to explore opportunities for civilian development, including police training. While the Dutch are supportive of an Afghan component to the NATO Summit in Strasbourg, they are unlikely to take an advocacy role. End Summary.

#### AFGHANISTAN DOMINATES DISCUSSIONS

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12. (C/NF) Neil Hawkins, Assistant Secretary, and Jon Merrill, Director, of the Afghanistan and Iraq Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, briefed Embassy Poloff on the Ministerial meetings on February 4. Merrill indicated that the meeting between the Ministers was dominated by Afghan issues, with discussions focused on how current operations are tracking and plans for future engagement. Both Ministers reaffirmed a commitment to assisting the Afghans, although Merrill stated that the Dutch focus is on assistance to the Afghan people and not on preventing a safe haven for terrorism. Both countries recognized the need for more security forces to support civilian activities and are exploring opportunities to work together on justice and security, reform capacity-building, and police training.

#### FUTURE PLANS FOR AFGHANISTAN

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13. (C/NF) Merrill shared that the Dutch are holding firm on their planned withdrawal of military leadership from RC-South in Oruzgan Province in August 2010, expressing a view that the Province will be fully civilianized by then. FM Smith is reported to have reacted skeptically, characterizing this as an incredibly optimistic outlook, given current security trends. Australia urged the Dutch not to withdraw too quickly and to coordinate with the Australians and the U.S. FM Verhagen acknowledged the optimistic outlook and advised

that the withdrawal will be a sensitive operation. He noted that troop rotation is running behind schedule, as forces promised by other NATO and ISAF contributing nations to relieve Dutch forces have not materialized as promised. FM Verhagen shared that the public narrative on PRT leadership withdrawal does not preclude a continued Dutch military presence in Afghanistan, but that domestic coalition political issues still need to be worked out. Merrill noted that "pride of ownership" for Dutch accomplishments in the province and a desire to see those accomplishments maintained, may influence Dutch troop withdrawal and future civilian contributions.

STRASBOURG NATO SUMMIT  
QSTRASBOURG NATO SUMMIT  
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¶4. (C/NF) While it has no objections to including an ISAF component at the Strasbourg NATO Summit, The Netherlands is unwilling to advocate for expansion of the Summit for its inclusion. Merrill shared that The Netherlands listened politely to Australia's concerns, but suggested that perhaps the Summit hosts have a different view.

¶5. (C/NF) Merrill acknowledged to Poloff that Australia has more work to do to get Afghanistan front and center with non-NATO countries and in the UN and that they are working these issues. Hawkins indicated that it would be unsatisfactory to hold an ISAF meeting of Foreign and Defense Ministers at some date after the Summit, as the Summit provides the international platform from which to send a strong message to the Taliban of global commitment and resolve. He expressed concern that the absence of

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Afghanistan from the Summit agenda would indicate a lack of urgency and reach.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND THE DUTCH  
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¶6. (C/NF) Merrill described the relationship between the countries as working well but noted it has not progressed beyond their military cooperation in RC-South. He commented that the Dutch acknowledged they do not have a leadership role in the EU or NATO and are looking for active UN engagement in Afghanistan, including opening of the promised UN regional office in Oruzgan. Merrill reported that the Dutch view themselves as a "good example" but not in a leadership role.

U.S. SUPPORT OF AUSTRALIAN MISSION IN KABUL  
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¶7. (C/NF) Separately, Hawkins took the opportunity to express the thanks of the Government of Australia for continued U.S. support of the Australian diplomatic mission in Kabul. He said they were very grateful for the all the U.S. has done to ensure continuity in their diplomatic operations.

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